Attentional focus in classical ballet: a survey of professional dancers
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The presentation is aimed at dance practitioners interested in the application of research findings as practical teaching tools.

Research on the effects of attentional focus to motor skills learning has consistently demonstrated that an 'external' focus (i.e., on the movement effect) enhances performance and learning relative to an 'internal' focus (i.e., on body movements). Given that many performers report focusing on body movements, spontaneously or as a result of internal focus instructions given by coaches, we deemed it important to identify what professional ballet dancers typically focus their attention on. We conducted a survey of 53 current or former professional dancers, that consisted of four questions: “What do you focus on / imagine / think when preparing / executing” “... a balance in 5th demi-pointe or pointe?”; “... a balance in arabesque demi-pointe or pointe?”; “... a pirouette en dehors?”; “... a grand jeté en avant?”.

Dancers demonstrated a high degree of creativity in their attentional foci, nevertheless 72% of the responses referred to their body movements to some degree (internal focus, or combination: internal and external). However, the prevalent use of certain foci depended on the type of skill. The results suggest that, while some professional dancers take advantage of the “power” of an external focus, not all dancers are using an optimal focus of attention at all times. There remains ample bandwidth for adjustments to be implemented in ballet practice. Simple modifications to the wording of instructions could have immediate impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of training and performance and a long-term impact on the sustainability of the technique.

In the presentation the complete findings of the survey will be reported and discussed, supported by a review of some attentional focus studies relevant to ballet performance.

Kurzbiografie des ersten Autors: Clare Guss-West's work integrates the latest scientific research on Optimal Focus, in complement with Eastern somatic techniques to deliver a holistic, effective approach to classical training. Techniques are translated into practical complementary tools, integrated directly into the ballet class to produce an immediate, palpable impact on precision, consistency, balance and fluidity of movement. Clare Guss-West taught for The Royal Ballet, Finnish National Ballet, Houston Ballet and RAD PDPTC at Staatsballett Berlin.